

2. Trade in America 55. 6

A
DISCOURSE
ON
TRADE;

More particularly on
Sugar and Tobacco:

SHEWING,
The TRUE and NATURAL MEANS
of their SUPPORT,
AND
The Unreasonableness of depending upon the
LEGISLATURE for their Relief.



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^A
DISCOURSE
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THE Trade of some of the *British* Plantations being decay'd, the Planters and Merchants concern'd, finding their Estates decline, run to the Legislature for Relief, just as if it were Matter of common Grievance; not considering how difficult it is for the Parliament to frame Laws for supporting

porting one Branch of a languishing Trade, without burthening the Publick, or the utmost Danger of loss by Navigation, or some other considerable Trade, which may fall a Sacrifice to our now more industrious Neighbours; that while we are soliciting and contending for Relief by Law, get Knowledge of our Circumstances and Weakness, which enables them to defeat us the further.

For Trade is no Inheritance to be secured by Laws, Industry, being the only Title; all Prohibitions, Duties and Bounties, without Industry, good Faith, Credit and Frugality, secure you no Certainty of it. It will not be fetter'd, though the Principles on which it moves are always the same: Yet as its Channels are various, according to the Com-motions of Princes, and different Care and Application of the People, so it is morally impossible for any restraining Law to fence against the Consequences attending the Execution of it; Ex-
perience

perience having shewn, that after such Laws, in a few Years Trade shifts; the old Channels of Business are quite diverted, and the intended Benefit thereby is defeated, if not turn'd to your Disadvantage.

It is the Cheapness of a Commodity, that, like a Load-Stone, draws the Eyes of all Traders upon it; then the Time, Hazard, and Charges, are consider'd how to come by it, the effecting of which, is as different, as the many different Situations of the Trading World that has a Demand for it.

Hence how much will People be mistaken, that instead of pursuing the common natural Methods of Trade, run after and perplex the Legislature in improper Cases, and from whom, they are unreasonable enough to expect immediate and continual Relief, as if it were in their Power to support and uphold them, not considering that the Legislature

ture acts only upon Principles and Views of common Good, and cannot hear a particular Complaint, that admits of no Relief, without Damage to the Publick. But I believe this general Failing of our Countrymen, the last meeting of the Parliament, appears more plain in the Debates of the *West-India* Trade, than from any thing I can say about it.

It is needless to say what a flourishing Branch of Trade that has been, and it is no Mystery to assert, that the Planters first Advantages there have been their latter Ruin; as, instead of attending the Work of the Plantation with their Negroes, they employ Negroes to attend and wait on themselves, and so turn'd their large acquired Gain and Credit into the ill Uses of Luxury and Idleness; which burthen'd the Islands with large Debts, in the very Times when their Trade was most flourishing, till their Neighbours the *French* took notice of their Sweets
by

by Trade; and Dangers by Indolence; and pursuing the necessary Industry in Trade, became not only capable of serving us cheaper than we could ourselves, but upon our prohibiting Trade with them, fell into serving the *European* Countries by means of low Prices; whilst our People, carelessly valuing themselves upon the Goodness of their Staple, kept up their Prices till they lost most of their Foreign Trade.

The Consequence of which was a Failure of their Wealth and Credit, and then they cry'd out, *Oh! the Parliament! the Parliament!* but how ridiculous is their Complaint, to think it in the Power of a Parliament to hinder our Neighbours from Planting, or to confine a foreign Consumption to our own Goods! No; nothing but under-selling our Neighbours (in which the Parliament can't assist, without Expence to the Publick) can help us;

but to retrieve all is now past Expectation.

This justly shews our Security by Moderation in all Sorts of Trading Gain, to prevent the Attempts of others breaking in upon us; it is easy to prevent a Mischief, but you see when you are once broke in upon, it is not in your Power to regain a lost Trade, as the *West-Indians*, you may be assured, will find it, to their own great Confusion and Loss, the Prejudice of Navigation, and the Ballance of Trade in this Kingdom.

And to prevent further Mischiefs of this Kind, I would caution the *Virginians* not to be too busy in forming Schemes, Laws, and weak Combinations to raise the Prices of their Staple too high, lest they fall into the same Error; and their Branch of Trade is very considerable towards the Welfare of *Great Britain*.

Though

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Though for some time past it must
be allow'd they have had very low
Prices for their Tobacco, yet as this
was occasion'd by two or three Years
Run of plentiful Crops, the Con-
sumption of the Commodity is no
ways lessened, but may rather be sup-
posed to encrease, as Cheapness is the
only Means to extend the Sale of any
Merchandize; so that the natural Turns
of a short Crop or two, which may
be expected, sets all right with them,
without the Helps of any new danger-
ous Laws, as long as our foreign Con-
sumption is preserv'd.

But these People are impatient, and
just upon the Point of running from
natural Methods to new Laws, by
which they seem to expect (by de-
stroying their ordinary Tobacco) to cut
out Prices for the rest according to
their own Liking; and they say if this
cannot be effected their Trade is in Dan-

ger of Ruin ; but by such Methods, by what goes before, they will in a little Time be instrumental to their own Ruin, and that of the Trade in general, by prosecuting that destructive Part of the Law ; but its more immediate ill Effects perhaps may be seen among the Planters ; and if the Disadvantages, by Favour and Corruption, fall most upon the Poor, other ill Consequences will ensue, to forward the Dangers arising from such Laws.

And to make this ruinous Part of the Law appear at first View ill-grounded, let us compare the *Virginia* Planter with the *British* Farmer, who for Plenty and small Gain is under the same Discouragements at this time as the Planter, and might with the same Parity of Reason desire new Laws to raise the Prices of Wheat, and other Grain ; or, what is in effect the same, to compel them to burn all their light Corn, that what is heavy and good may sell the

the better; but see if you can persuade Farmers to come into such Methods; Neither needs there any Law, but that of Nature, which from the beginning has been sufficient to guide us in these two Extremes of Scarcity and Plenty.

First, in regard to the great Law-giver, who by his Providence supports us many different Ways, may not He, another Year, reduce this Plenty even to a Scarcity? Would it not then be mere Madness to destroy all the ordinary Grain, because at this Time Prices are low, and so endanger our starving poor Families the next Year for want of Bread? And so it may be said of a poor Planter, that in a scarce Year, when he has burnt the Ordinary, the Good left will scarce pay Taxes, that the poor Man will be without Cloaths, if not a Habitation.

Had the Legislature in *Virginia*, in Times of Plenty, provided Store-Houses, instead

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instead of Bonfires; for their Tobacco,
it would have had a much more provident
Look; and to me it seems as easy and
natural to Store up Tobacco as Grain;
I am sure the former is in less danger
of waste by Vermin.

And what will be another great Dis-
advantage to the People of *Virginia* by
this Law, is their reducing the Pro-
duct of their Estates, while the People
of *Maryland*, which is the Governor's
Interest to continue, send Home, and
make Money of the last Leaf; but
when that Leaf ceases to be of any va-
lue, they will naturally leave it out.

For no Man continues long doing
Something for Nothing; nay, it is not
in his Power to subsist on such a Foot-
ing; hence it is plain, that every honest
Man in his Senses, will leave out
of his Package, all such Trash as is un-
fit for Use, and to destroy that which
is Merchantable and Useful, that has
cost

cost him Labour and Money, no Man in his Senses would do; for is it not destroying with one Hand, what you raised with the other?

But their Way of Reasoning is, they shall receive such high Prices for the Good Tobacco, that it will answer the burning the Bad, which has hitherto depreciated the Value of the Good; but by what follows the Fallacy of this Reasoning will appear: First, who will continue to burn their Fingers for them, by giving such high Prices? but allowing it to be so, for a Year or two, so that by means of high Prices, two Hogsheds of Tobacco produce as much as three Hogsheds or more, by this the Planter falls into the Dangers of encouraging Foreign Planting, and so hazards the fatal Consequences which have lately happen'd to the *West-Indians*.

Secondly,

Secondly; To shew how little the Importation of ordinary Tobacco depreciates the value of the Good, take notice of our Exports of Tobacco to *Italy* and *Spain*, and you will find little or nothing done there, when the Prices of Tobacco are high; the Demand there arising entirely from the low Prices with us, without any regard to the Quality; and a great part of our Traders in *Norway* and the *East* do the same; - that the destroying these cheap Goods, will be the Effect of destroying great Part of our Trade. And this is confirm'd by the small Exports of Sweets this Year to *Holland* and *Hambro*.

But allowing the same to be continued, can any Body suppose, that selling ordinary Tobacco cheap in *Spain*, *Norway* or *Hambro* (who if we did not, could supply themselves elsewhere) makes good Tobacco sell the worse in *France*, *Holland*, or even in *Hambro*? When the
Good

Good finds its Value, by its Strength, Colour and Flavour, and where those Qualities are in Esteem, a Price equal thereto will be given, though the Market is full of Ordinary.

There seems another Error in their Way of Thinking, and that is, if the Ordinary Tobacco be destroy'd, they shall always have higher Prices for the Good; but upon better Consideration, it must be allow'd, that in times of Plenty, even of the best Sorts, that the Prices will be lower'd in Proportion to that Plenty, and this Effect of Plenty will not depend altogether upon the Supply of our Plantations; for if Foreigners dislike our Prices, and provide themselves elsewhere, we may have Tobacco a greater Drug upon our Hands, by the Importation of 30,000 Hogsheads yearly, than at this Time, when we Import more than twice that Quantity.

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And

And the Hazard of this will more plainly appear, by relating a Case of the Tobacco-Trade, between the *English* and *Russians*: As I have been inform'd, a Company of *English* Merchants, who had a Grant for that Trade, brought the *Russians* under Contract to take Tobacco of them at high Prices, for a Term of Years, by which the Company gained thirty thousand Pounds. But mark the Consequence, when the Term was expired the *Russians* shook off the Imposition and fell both to Planting and Manufacturing, by which we lost a great Branch of Business; and justly shews how tender we ought to be to preserve our Foreign Consumption as the grand Support of the Tobacco Trade.

To secure which, nothing can conduce more than a sufficient and regular Supply yearly from our Plantations; in order to which, let every Man plant
at

at Discretion, as he shall judge by the Demand here it may answer his Expectation and Labour; in which Case the Planter is under no particular Hardship, having as much Certainty, by Advices, from Time to Time, as all other Planters and Manufacturers who vend their Goods at great Distance can have.

Let every Man, as he may judge it for his Interest, send Home Tobacco of all Sorts, provided it be merchantable and fit for Use; and in Times of Plenty, let him keep back Part, or ship the Whole, every Man as it suits his Conveniency; by which Means the Merchant will be better secured from Loss by Shipping, *Europe* will yearly have a constant Supply, and the Tobacco Trade preserv'd in its full Extent for the Benefit of the Planters, Merchants, Tradesmen and Navigation; for as Quantities of Goods are lessened, so is Trade and Shipping; and a Hoghead of ordinary Tobacco imported into this Kingdom is as

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profitable

profitable thereto, in many respects, as the Best.

I am not to be understood, but Laws in many Cases are useful to a Trading People, and so I think the new *Virginia* Law, even to inspect Goods, and see that they are really Tobaccos, and merchantable; to which if an Amendment was made to direct a Sortment in the Package, it might be more useful; which, by the help of Transfer Notes for odd Parcels, may be practicable.

As for instance; let all Stemm'd Tobacco be entire, and so Hands, and then let these be sub-divided into three further Sortments, of Best, Middling, and Ordinary; this added to the present Regulation of true Weights and Times, and Places for Shipping, is bringing Things to greater Certainty, and no doubt will answer the Charge and Trouble, by suiting the several
Markets

Markets more neat and entire, according to the Sorts they want; which will take off the Clamour of Buyers against false Package, and encourage them, both in *Virginia* and at Home, to Bid and Buy more freely.

This, together with the other Regulations, it may be hoped, with a little Practice, will bring on a better Dispatch for Ships, for the Encouragement of the Merchants; for tho' the Planters do not immediately suffer by the Ships Delay, if they continue to act entirely regardless of the Merchants Interest on that Head, they will find the ill Effects at last to fall upon themselves.

The Helps from *British* Laws for Trade are such as encourage and prefer the Use of our own, and Plantation Products and Manufactures, before those of Strangers, and to enable us, by cheap and easy Methods to carry on our Exports

ports into the Countries of Strangers ; for these are certain Advantages to the Kingdom, by employing the Poor, and encreasing (or keeping Strangers from running Goods upon us to lessen) the Ballance in our Favour.

But some of these Advantages having no other Help from Law, save high Duties and Prohibitions on Goods of our foreign Neighbours, it puts People on both Sides upon Inventions to trade Clandestinely, which defeats the King's Officers from giving a true Account of our Imports, and a just Representation to the Parliament, that no doubt, but we hug ourselves with many a false Ballance.

This puts me in mind of the Benefit of Trade, by an equal Levy of the Duties upon the Traders therein; the Abuses in which are often carried on by the Corruption of the Officers both in the Excise and Customs, upon proof

proof of which, no doubt but the Government is always ready to do Justice, by admitting of Amendments in Laws for Prevention, having due regard not to burthen the State with too great Charges, or the Trader with much Trouble and Delay, which would perplex and stagger all Business.

Therefore, if at this Time there are any Abuses under this Head, in the Tobacco Trade, the Merchants, in Concert with the Planters, should propose a candid Scheme, consistent with the Dispatch Business requires; so that they themselves shall have no Hindrance, nor Room to prejudice the Revenue, or one another.

And it is very natural to suppose, that some of the Merchants are well furnished with Knowledge to prevent such Evils, and should they want further Help, those good Officers of the Customs without Doors that have shut their

their Eyes, and lent a helping Hand,
will no doubt be proper Assistants in
such a Scheme.

The only Objection is, These Gen-
tlemen's excelling in Schemes so con-
trary to their old Principles; but they
had better do this than continue their
Frauds till they are discovered and ex-
posed.

So that it is expected some new Re-
gulation of this Sort will be sent to the
Company of Merchants Trading to
Virginia, that they may consider it a-
gainst the Meeting of the Parliament,
and have Opportunity to convince the
Legislature how much it is their own
Desire to pay their Duties fairly.

October 17, 1732.

F I N I S.

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